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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000430

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MARR KDEM KPKO UN IV  
SUBJECT: UNOCI SAYS DDR UNLIKELY BEFORE ELECTION

REF: A. ABIDJAN 411  
    1B. 08 ABIDJAN 878  
    1C. 08 ABIDJAN 870

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Silvia Eiriz for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary. Ouaga IV (the fourth supplementary agreement to the Ouagadougou Political Agreement (OPA)) calls for disarmament of the Forces Nouvelles (FAFN) and dismantlement of the militias to be completed two months before the presidential election, currently scheduled to be held on November 29, 2009. According to the United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI), there is no political will for the FAFN to disarm before the election and, while the militias have officially been dismantled, they could quickly be reactivated. In spite of this, UNOCI believes it is possible to have an election free of violence as long as all the political parties have the will to do so. End Summary.

DDR and Ouaga IV

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12. (SBU) According to UNOCI, 11,766 FAFN troops were "regrouped" between December 22, 2007 and October 22, 2008 (7,701 were demobilized and the other 4,065 are slated to join the country's new army) and 17,292 militia members were dismantled between February 2 and May 30, 2009. Ouaga IV provides that the Integrated Command Center (ICC) carries out demobilization/dismantlement under the supervision of the "impartial forces" (UNOCI and the French Licorne troops). Ouaga IV also provides that a new national army will be stood up within one month of the inauguration of the next President.

Militia Easy to Reactivate

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13. (C) Militia leaders provided the ICC with lists of their members. The ICC took the photograph and fingerprints of each militia member it demobilized and issued each one a demobilization card. Sidi Zahabi, Chief of UNOCI's Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reinsertion (DDR) division, told Poloff on July 14 that a database of the structure of the militias as well as their members now exists. He informed Poloff that the ICC retrieved cards from militia members issued to them by the national military which identified them as supporters of the military. Zahabi said retrieval of the cards was important because they gave the militia members power over civilians, for example for securing bribes at illegal checkpoints. Zahabi's staff showed Poloff scanned copies of the cards which looked very official and which were marked "Republic of Cote d'Ivoire" and included the country's motto. According to UNOCI, the only weapons collected from the militia were: 5 firearms, 7,077 small caliber munitions, 2 large caliber munitions, and 28 grenades. These weapons are now held in containers by the ICC in their headquarters in Yamoussoukro. Zahabi said he believes the militias turned over most of their weapons to the Ivoirian military. He said it would be easy to reactivate the militias and have the military re-arm them.

Zahabi said another danger is that the dismantled militia members are awaiting receipt of the 500,000 CFA (circa USD 1,000) promised to them by Ouaga IV, but which the government now seems unwilling to pay. (Comment: The fact that cards were issued by the military to the militias underscores that they were not independent groups, but were and could again be mobilized by elements in the government. End Comment.)

No DDR Before Elections

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¶4. (C) Zahabi told Poloff that, although Ouaga IV says DDR must be completed two months before the presidential election, there is no political will to do so. Zahabi said the FAFN do not want to disarm before identification and voter registration cards are distributed (See Reftel A). He added that the FAFN also want to postpone DDR in order to make a deal with whoever is elected president to ensure that their concerns are taken into account. One of the causes of the 2002 FAFN rebellion was discrimination against and disenfranchisement of northerners.

¶5. (C) Zahabi dismissed the May 26 ceremony marking the transfer of power from the FAFN zone commanders (comzones) to the prefects as symbolic. Zahabi noted that unified revenue collection has not been implemented and the comzones continue to profit from customs duties and tax revenue. Zahabi added that security also remains in the comzones' hands since of the 8,000 police and gendarmes to be deployed in ICC "mixed" units (4,000 FAFN members and 4,000 members of the government security forces), only 500 have been deployed to date: 400 in Bouake and 100 in Abidjan.

ABIDJAN 00000430 002 OF 002

¶6. (C) Zahabi believes peaceful elections can be held even without disarmament of the FAFN as long as the political will exists. Zahabi said he does not anticipate trouble on election day in the area of the country under FAFN control since there are only two major cities - Bouake and Korhogo - in that region and their populations are generally expected to vote for the RDR candidate. Zahabi noted that UNOCI will ensure that the country's borders are closed on election day, but explained that this will be done mostly to keep out troublemakers rather than out of fear that large numbers of citizens of neighboring countries will attempt to enter the country and vote. Zahabi said that it is critical for the political parties to be forced to abide by the provisions of the Code of Good Conduct (devised via a USG-funded NDI project) that they signed in the presence of the UN Secretary General in Abidjan on April 24, 2008.

¶7. (C) Comment. Zahabi may be correct that an election free of violence can be held even if the FAFN have not disarmed and effectively remain in control of the northern part of the country as long as the entire political class accepts this scenario. However, Ouaga IV explicitly calls for DDR before the election. Hardliners in the FPI have said an election is not possible until DDR has taken place (See Reftels B & C). Those who have an interest in delaying elections could easily play this card.

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